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AMERICAN ATTITUDES

Twenty percent of the American public would support the use of U.S. troops if leftist guerrillas appeared on the verge of victory in El Salvador, while 18 percent would favor that the United States do nothing, says a poll released Monday.

Most who had an opinion on the question, 29 percent, would favor trying to negotiate a solution.

And yet, a communist takeover of the Central American country through a peaceful election was viewed as a great threat to the United States by 21 percent of the Americans polled between Oct. 29 and Nov. 6, and another 43 percent agreed it would be "somewhat of a threat."

These are among the findings in a survey of American attitudes on foreign policy issues, sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. It was conducted by the Gallup organization.

CIA Director William Casey said in a speech, meanwhile, that Marxists in Central America have "mounted a propaganda program that has a large part of the American public brainwashed into believing that what's happening down there is just innocent peasants seeking their rights."

Casey, addressing a conference of private executives, acknowledged that the Reagan administration has been losing the struggle for public opinion.

"We don't know how to go out and explain what's happening, explain the situation from our viewpoint," Casey said. "The government is a little clumsy at that."

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